

WORK ZONE

REDUCING MISHAPS BY 50%

Drowsy Driving

A 29-year-old E-3 was driving home to Georgia (600 miles away) to take care of family matters. At 0530, he fell asleep at the wheel and drifted to the shoulder of a highway, eventually swerving off the road. He suffered multiple fractures to his right femur and several bumps and bruises when his car landed in a culvert. He spent six days in a hospital and another 30 days on convalescent leave.

Elsewhere, an 18-year-old E-2 was driving home from a coffee shop at 0315 when he, too, fell asleep at the wheel. His vehicle crossed the opposite lane of traffic before he woke up, cut the wheel, and hit a tree. He spent four days in a hospital and, at last report, had spent 49 days on convalescent leave with a broken vertebra and three fractures to his jaw.

These Sailors are part of the 51 percent of adults in the United States who report driving while drowsy each year. They're also part of the 17 percent who actually doze off.

Statistics show that younger adults are more likely than older ones to drive drowsy (60 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds, 54 percent of 30-to-64-year-olds, 21 percent of those 65 and older). The statistics for those who doze off are 24 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds, 15 percent of 30-to-64-year-olds, and six percent of those 65 and older.

Danger Signals

If you're about to fall asleep, you'll experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- ☛ You have trouble keeping your eyes open and focused.
- ☛ You nod and can't keep your head up.
- ☛ You daydream or have wandering, disconnected thoughts.

- ☛ You yawn a lot or need to rub your eyes.
- ☛ You find yourself drifting out of your lane or tailgating.
- ☛ You miss road signs or drive past your turn.
- ☛ You feel irritable, restless and impatient.
- ☛ On an interstate, you drift off the road and hit the rumble strips.

If you have even one of these symptoms, you could be sleepier than you think. Pull off the road and get some sleep.

Risk Factors

Research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has found several risk factors implicated in drowsy-driving crashes. Ask yourself these questions:

- ☛ Have you been awake for 20 hours or more?
- ☛ Have you had six hours of sleep or less in the last 24 hours?
- ☛ Do you often drive between midnight and 6 a.m.?
- ☛ Do you frequently feel drowsy while you're driving?
- ☛ Do you work a night shift?
- ☛ Do you work more than one job?

If you have any of these indicators, you're at a much higher risk of having a drowsy-driving crash, even if you don't feel sleepy. Half the drivers who have drowsy-driving crashes say they felt "only slightly sleepy" or "not at all sleepy" right before the crash. 